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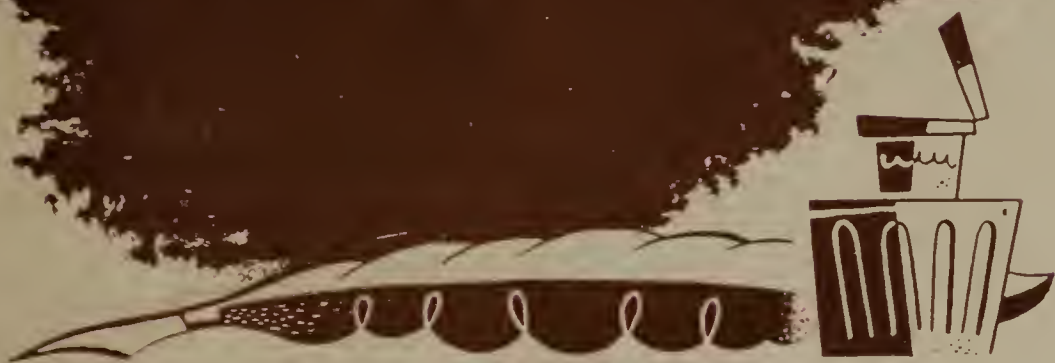
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CONNECTICUT VALLEY HISTORICAL MUSEUM  
Autumn — 1955

## Calendar of Events

September 25 — October 16

“SOCIAL LIFE IN THE 1880’S — photographs by Leonard Dakin.

An exhibition of 100 enlarged photographs by Leonard Dakin records in charming frankness the picnics, buggy rides, tennis matches, archery, sailing, rope skipping, fence climbing, charades and lawn parties of the young people of the 1880’s in Cherry Valley, New York.

When most photographers were using head clamps and time exposures, Leonard Dakin, an enthusiastic young amateur, improvised a speed shutter with elastic bands and experimented in making candid shots of his friends in action.

Sixty years later, when the glass plate negatives of these photographs were found in a barn, Mr. Dakin was “discovered” as one of the pioneers in candid photography.

Mrs. Pauline Dakin Taft will lecture Sunday afternoon, October 2nd at 3:00 o’clock.

October 3, 10 and 17

Dr. Marine Leland of the Smith College Faculty will inaugurate a new series of lectures on Monday, October 3 at 8:00 o’clock. One of the outstanding authorities on French Canada in this country, she will give a digest of her French-Canadian Civilization Course at Smith College in three lectures with special emphasis on the historical relationship between New France and the Connecticut Valley — October 3, 10, and 17.

Since the ideas behind these lectures are to give a course on French Canada in capsule form to meet the audience at least half-way by starting with what is familiar, Dr. Leland will present the material as follows:

### NEW FRANCE AND NEW ENGLAND — October 3

Points of similarity and difference between the French and English colonies. Population — the figures here are startling. The cultural institutions brought from France, with special emphasis on Quebec City which many Americans have visited. The reasons for the

*(Continued on Page Eleven)*



# A Canadian Explorer In Deerfield

## Jacques De Noyon (1668-1745)

by: MARINE LELAND  
Smith College  
Northampton, Mass.

to: J. P. BERTRAND  
*Canadian descendant of the  
French family of Deerfield.  
President of the Thunder Bay  
Historical Society  
Port Arthur, Ontario*

ON FEBRUARY 3, 1704, the Reverend John Williams, the beloved Pastor of Deerfield, performed a marriage which is still of interest today. The bride, Abigail Stebbins, was in her teens. Her father, John Stebbins, and her mother, Dorothy Alexander Stebbins, were of solid English Puritan stock. The bridegroom was thirty-six, twice Abigail's age. He had not been in Deerfield very long, and he spoke English with a foreign accent, a French accent. On his and Abigail's marriage certificate, his name appears as James Denio.

The young couple's honeymoon turned out to be a grim one. Less than a month after their wedding (twenty-six days, to be exact) Deerfield was attacked by the Canadian leader, Jean-Baptiste Hertel de Rouville, and his band of Canadian militiamen and Abenaki Indians. John Stebbins' house, as well as many others, was burned to the ground. Of Deerfield's two hundred and eighty-four inhabitants, forty-four were slain, and one hundred and four were "captivated" and carried off to Canada "whence," as it is written in the old annals, "many came not back."<sup>1</sup>

Among the captives who set out on the dreary march to Canada, through the solitude of Vermont, were Abigail Stebbins Denio and her husband — or, was *he* a captive? Might he not have been a French spy? His contemporaries undoubtedly knew the answers to these questions, just as we know and take for granted many things that may puzzle posterity. But to the 19th and 20th Century descendants of the Captives (notably to Miss C. Alice Baker, one of Deerfield's fine historians), and to many others as well, the presence of James Denio, a Frenchman, in Deerfield on the night of the Massacre, has seemed very suspicious indeed.

In 1896, after years of research in Canada and in the United States, Miss Baker published her findings in *True Stories of New England Captives*. The material which she assembled here provides a solid basis for any further study of James Denio, or rather, Jacques De Noyon, as Miss Baker discovered his real name to be. Yet, after searching through all available records, she wrote

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<sup>1</sup>Abigail's parents and her five brothers and sisters were taken captive. John Stebbins, his wife and their two oldest sons, John Jr. and Samuel returned to Deerfield. Their four other children, Abigail, Thankful, Ebenezer and Joseph remained in Canada.

with her customary forthrightness, "Of his career up to the time of his coming to Deerfield, I am ignorant."

The following is based, for a large part, on historical material which has come to light since Miss Baker's death. While they fall short of providing a complete biography of Jacques De Noyon, and while they leave a number of questions unanswered still, they add some important details to the little that is known in New England concerning Abigail Stebbins' mysterious bridegroom:

Jacques De Noyon was born at Trois-Rivières, "the Cradle of Explorers," half-way between Montreal and Quebec. When he was a small boy, his family moved to Boucherville across from the Island of Montreal. In many ways, Boucherville resembled Deerfield, three hundred miles away. Both were agricultural communities. Both were model communities. The De Noyons, like the Stebbinses, were honest, hard-working, God-fearing people. John Stebbins was a carpenter and a farmer. Jean De Noyon, Jacques' father, was a gunsmith and a farmer. Both the New Englander and the Canadian were settlers at heart. Both were satisfied to stay in one place and sink deep roots there.

There was, however, one enormous difference between the New England village and its counterpart in New France. Deerfield was isolated. The big, busy centers, Boston and Albany were one hundred miles distant from it, to the East and West. Boucherville, on the contrary, lay only a few miles from Montreal, and Montreal, the center of the Canadian fur trade, was an exciting place where rich merchants, the Lemoynes, Lebers, Charons, and many others, were always on the look-out for likely young fellows, full of courage and initiative, willing to go out into the wilderness to act as contact-men between the fur interests of Montreal and the Western Indians who provided the furs.

To young Jacques De Noyon and his contemporaries in Canada, the place, the relatively secure life of the artisan-farmer seemed unbearably monotonous, especially when compared with the freedom, the glamor of the bushrangers' life, the life of the *Coueurs de bois*, "the runners in the woods." As one of the governors of New France expressed it in a letter to the King's Minister in Paris, "I cannot tell you how attractive this life is to *all* our youth." Indeed, it has been estimated that in less than a century, between the years 1670 and 1760, some 14,000 *coueurs de bois* left from Montreal for the West and the North. Among these were Radisson, who went over to the English and was one of the founders of the Hudson's Bay Company, and his friend, Des Groseillers; Duluth, Joliet, Nicolas Perrot who left interesting *Memoirs*, and Jacques De Noyon, the mysterious James Denio of Deerfield.

In 1688, when he was barely twenty years old, we find him twelve hundred miles from home, at present-day Fort William, at the mouth of the Kaministiquia River, on the western shore of Lake Superior.<sup>2</sup> At this spot, some ten

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<sup>2</sup>I am deeply indebted to Mr. J. P. Bertrand, a Canadian descendant of the French family of Deerfield, and President of the Thunder Bay Historical Society, for information on the topography of the territory through which Jacques De Noyon travelled.



years before, Duluth had established a trading-post, known as Trois-Rivieres. Farther west than this, in what is now Canada, no white man had ever gone. What prompted Jacques De Noyon to go farther? Certainly, the desire to meet new Indian tribes and persuade them to sell their furs to the French. But the Canadian bushrangers were also explorers. It is to them that we owe the discovery of vast regions of this continent. Like many others, Jacques De Noyon hoped to be the first to reach the Pacific Ocean, the Western Sea, as it was called.

Sometime, in the autumn of 1688, he paddled boldly up the Kaministiquia River, and westward along innumerable streams. He spent the winter at Rainy Lake, in what is now Central Ontario. Here, he met a party of Sioux Indians who offered to guide him to the Western Sea. But their tall tales of fortified cities on the West Coast, of the bearded white men who lived in them, and rode on horseback "with their women behind," convinced De Noyon that such an expedition would be nothing but a wild-goose chase. When spring came, he continued his journey and reached the Lake of the Woods.<sup>3</sup> All the way, he had made detailed notes on the route he travelled.<sup>4</sup>

A few months later, he was back in Montreal. His activities during the next few years can be traced through the contracts which the Montreal traders were in the habit of making with the *coureurs de bois* whom they employed.

During those years, things went pretty well for Jacques De Noyon. In the autumn, he paddled up the Ottawa River, west of Montreal, and spent the winter with the Ottawawa Indians whose territory extended between Lake Huron and Lake Michigan, and north of these lakes. In the spring, De Noyon and his fellow-bushrangers rounded up their Indian friends, and together they would bring great packs of furs to Montreal where the bartering took place. One wonderful year, 1693, four hundred canoes laden with pelts valued at more than one million dollars of our money, and manned by two hundred *coureurs de bois* and one thousand Indians, reached Montreal.

De Noyon spent his summers at Boucherville with his family. But, even here, his chief preoccupation was the fur trade. He was busy making arrangements, signing contracts, and obtaining his *Congé*, his permit to leave the colony and go on the next autumn's expedition. Neither farming nor marriage ever entered his head. Freedom, absolute freedom from every kind of tie was all that his heart apparently desired, unless it was adventure. There never was a dull moment in the forest, and quick money could be made there, especially by those bold enough and clever enough to elude the watchfulness of the French colonial authorities and get in touch with the English colonies

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<sup>3</sup>The Lake of the Woods is today a Tourists' Paradise. It lies almost wholly in Western Ontario. From North to South, it extends for sixty-five miles to Minnesota. From East to West, it extends for the same distance to Manitoba. It has never been completely surveyed, but it is believed to contain over 12,000 islands.

<sup>4</sup>The original of this report is lost. That it existed can only be surmised from allusions to De Noyon's expedition which are found in a plan for western explorations which was sent to Versailles by Governor Vaudreuil and Intendant Bégon nearly thirty years later, in 1716. (Public Archives of Canada. C 88 E Vol. 16, pp. 31-50).

where British officials and independent traders vied with each other in their efforts to establish contact with the French bushrangers and their allies, the Ottawawa Indians. Quite aside from avoiding the tax which the French government exacted on all sales in Canada, the bushrangers obtained far better prices for their furs in Albany than they did in Montreal. Moreover, the English traders paid in hard cash and not in *card money* as did the French.

As time went on, so many *coureurs de bois* managed to make their way to Albany, instead of going to Montreal, that the fur trade of Canada was seriously affected. From Quebec, Government officials wrote agitatedly to Versailles. They complained not only of the decline in the fur trade, but also of the fact that too few Canadians were willing to stay in the villages and till the soil.

When Louis XIV learned that fully one third of the adult male population of New France had deserted the farms and taken to the woods, he decided that the time for drastic action had arrived. He issued an edict cancelling all permits to leave the colony. In the fall of 1697, a detachment of French soldiers, under the command of a French Officer, was stationed on the Ottawa River with the strictest orders not to allow anyone to pass.

January 1, 1698, was a sad one for some fifteen hundred or more, probably more, *coureurs de bois*. Jacques De Noyon spent it in Boucherville, restless, nervous, frustrated. As ill-luck would have it, an old enemy of his, Gilles Papin, a former clerk in one of the big trading companies, crossed his path. Harsh words were exchanged. Papin drew his sword. De Noyon was wounded, promptly sued Papin before the courts and lost his case, Papin having claimed that he had been provoked beyond endurance by De Noyon's insults.

To De Noyon this seemed the last straw. Shortly after hearing the verdict, he decided to follow the example of scores of bushrangers who had already escaped the unbearable tedium of life on a farm. Eluding the somewhat lax vigilance of the French detachment on the Ottawa River, he made his way to the territory of his friends, the Ottawawas and to freedom. Yet much as he loved the forest, De Noyon looked upon it as a means of livelihood, not as a permanent abode. He had no desire to break with civilization. His thoughts naturally turned to the English.

Meanwhile, news of the situation in Canada had reached the English colonies. In August, 1700, John Schuyler of Albany, who had been staying in Montreal at the house of a trader, Montour, wrote to the Earl of Bellomont, the British Governor of New York and New England, that he had learned that thirty Canadian bushrangers were planning to come to Albany.

Two weeks later, Samuel York, who had been taken captive by the French at Casco Bay in 1690 and had just escaped from them, also sent word to the Earl of Bellomont. "I can speak the Ottawawa language," he wrote, "and know the country very well, and can be guide thither. Several of the French *coureurs de bois* or hunters are there, and in a sort of rebellion. They are very desirous to come and trade here with the English. . . . They have desired me to try to make their terms with your Lordship, and they will come and settle here under your government somewhere near the Five Nations, and would



endeavor to invite the Ottawawas to settle there with them. I have often heard the Ottawawas express a longing desire to trade with the English in these plantations. The French in Canada are not able to furnish those people with goods, which they are sensible of, and are, therefore, impatient of being confined to that narrow trade with them.”<sup>5</sup>

The Earl of Bellomont acted quickly. Within a few weeks, De Noyon and a friend of his, Louis Gosselin, had made their way from the Ottawawa country to New York. Here, at the end of October 1700, they affixed their signatures to the following *Memorial*.<sup>6</sup>

“My Lord,

We, Jean De Noyon and Louis Gosselin, come to place ourselves under your Excellency’s protection, in the hope that you will allow us to live and trade with King William’s subjects in the town of Albany, and grant us the same rights and privileges as others enjoy, in which case we submit ourselves with promise of fidelity to the laws of the Government.

We are commissioned by our comrades to assure you, if our request is granted, that twenty-two, all fine young men, will come to Albany next February.

And after that we promise to bring in the month of September of the year 1701, thirty brave fellows to the said town of Albany, all laden with peltry.

And, finally, we oblige ourselves further in good faith to bring, in the afore-said month of September, on our return from hunting, ten or twelve of the principal Sachems of the Ottawawa Nations.

Dated in New York this 26th October, 1700.

De Noyon  
L. Gosselin.

A true copy  
(Signed) Bellomont”

This *Memorial* and the circumstances which led Jacques De Noyon to sign it, give us the answer to the fundamental question, Was James Denio a French spy? Clearly, he was not. On the contrary, he was escaping from the French, and like many other bushrangers, he intended to settle in the English colonies.

Yet, it should be noted that in the part of the *Memorial* which was drawn up by Bellomont’s secretary, De Noyon is called *John* (Jean) and not James (Jacques). Miss Baker who knew the *Memorial* and reproduced it in her *True Stories of New England Captives*, was too scrupulous an historian not to pause before this important detail. “It is possible,” she surmised cautiously and sensibly, “that the translator may unconsciously have rendered *Jacques*

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<sup>5</sup>*Documents Relative to the Colonial History of the State of New York*. Albany, 1854. Vol. IV, p. 749.

<sup>6</sup>*op. cit.*, *loc. cit.*, p. 797. The *Memorial* was drawn up in French and translated into English. In the *N. Y. Hist. Docs.*, only the English translation is given. The originals of the French text and its English translation are at the Public Record Office in London.

by Jack, the nickname of John, and thus changed the name. This question is left to be solved by future historians' research either directly from Canada, or, more likely, from Albany."

So far, Albany has yielded nothing new, but the evidence which has come to light in Canadian records makes it abundantly clear that the man who sought Bellomont's protection was none other than Jacques De Noyon who later turned up at Deerfield as James Denio. Moreover, it is interesting to note that when he affixed his signature to the *Memorial*, De Noyon, contrary to his habit, used only his last name.

The *Memorial* is the last document by which De Noyon's career can be traced until we come upon the certificate of his marriage to Abigail Stebbins, four years later, in the Deerfield Town Records. Where he was during those four years, at what date he reached Deerfield, and what train of circumstances brought him there, are questions regarding which we are as much in the dark as Miss Baker was a half century ago.

If De Noyon fulfilled his promise to Bellomont, he spent the winter of 1700-01 in the territory of the Ottawawas and remained there until September. The Earl of Bellomont died in New York the preceding March. It is possible that after Bellomont's death, if not before, De Noyon came under John Schuyler's influence. The two men had several traits and many interests in common, and besides knowing the situation in Canada at first hand, Schuyler kept in close touch with New England. It is conceivable that he was instrumental in getting De Noyon to Deerfield. But all this is surmise, pure and simple. As for the date of his arrival in Deerfield, we can only suppose that he was there long enough to win the love of young Abigail, *and* the consent of her parents. The latter may have taken longer! On the other hand, there is no evidence whatsoever that James Denio's contemporaries in Deerfield looked upon him as a spy. Had they done so, the Reverend John Williams, for one, would surely have mentioned this circumstance in *The Redeemed Captive Returning to Zion*, his account of the Massacre and of his captivity in Canada.

But, if, as evidence proves, James Denio was not a spy, but a turncoat, other questions arise. What were his feelings when he met Hertel de Rouville on the night of the Massacre? Did he go back to Canada as a captive, a captured deserter, fearful of the punishment which awaited him at the end of the long road? If this was his state of mind, his fears were soon allayed. New France needed men of his experience and ability, and although the laws against faithless *coureurs de bois* were harsh in the extreme (on the books) they were seldom applied. Amnesty was the rule, not the exception.

On a wintry day in March, 1704, Abigail and Jacques reached his family's farm in Boucherville. Less than four months later, De Noyon was hundreds of miles away, at Michillimakinac, in the employ of the French government!

As for Abigail Denio, now Gabrielle De Noyon, indications are that she did not adapt to life in New France as quickly as did many of her fellow-captives. Four years elapsed before she embraced her husband's religion and was baptized into the Catholic Church under the name *Marguerite*. A few



years later, in 1714, she sent her oldest child René, a boy of ten, to Deerfield to visit his grandparents Stebbins who promptly named him Aaron. The boy never returned to Canada, and is the ancestor of the New England Denios.

Eleven years later, in August, 1725, Abigail obtained a permit from the Governor of New France to go to Deerfield herself, supposedly to fetch her son back. Here, on February 26, 1726, twenty-two years almost to the day after the Massacre, she gave birth to her thirteenth and last child. The following November, Abigail was back in Boucherville where the child was baptized.

Abigail Stebbins-Marguerite De Noyon died in Canada in 1740. Her husband survived her five years. The Discoverer of the Lake of the Woods, the Mysterious Bridegroom of Deerfield, died in poverty, in obscurity, and on a farm. He is buried at Boucherville.

But history remembers him, and it remembers him not as a spy, not as a faithless bushranger, but as one of the Pathfinders, as the man who opened the Gateway to the Canadian West.

#### A FEW REFERENCES TO JACQUES DE NOYON IN CANADIAN PUBLICATIONS

BURPEE, J. LAURENCE, *Journals and Letters of Pierre Gaultier de Varennes de la Verendrye and his Sons*. Toronto, The Champlain Society, 1927, p. 6.

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MASSICOTTE, E. Z., *Jacques De Noyon: nouveaux détails sur sa carrière*. *Bulletin des Recherches historiques*. Lévis, P. Q. Vol. 48 (1942), p. 121 ff.

POPHAM, EARL C., *The Canadian Geographical Journal*, Vol. IX, July, 1934, p. 157 ff.

SULTE, BENJAMIN, *Jacques De Noyon*. *Bulletin des Recherches historique*. Lévis, P. Q. Vol. 14, (1908), p. 183 ff.

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## Calendar of Events — *Continued from page Two*

“French and Indian Wars.” Did WE ever invade Canada? The Springfield captives in Canada. The fall of Quebec in September, 1759; the fall of Montreal in September, 1760; and the end of the French regime.

### WHY FRENCH CANADA SURVIVED — October 10

This lecture will deal with the period from 1763 to 1867 and will tie in this era in Canada with what is known here. There is no more important reason for the survival of French Canada than the American Revolution. It led to the preservation of the Quebec Civil Code and to everything that was embodied in the QUEBEC ACT (the 5th of the Five Intolerable Acts, from our point of view). The Rebellion of 1837 which was not exclusively a French-Canadian Rebellion, but one which also took place in Ontario. In other words, this was not a racial episode, but was a fight for responsible government.

With the coming of railroads, the idea of a Confederation of the different colonies which made up what we now call Canada was broached. By this time, Quebec was in a strong enough position to bargain before it joined the Confederation. In short, the French-Canadians have had great luck in always having history provide them with an opportunity to bargain, and in having men who were astute enough to take advantage of the opportunity.

### FRENCH CANADA TODAY — October 17

The Province of Quebec, a “Young Mother Country” to the French-Canadians in other Canadian Provinces and in New England. Relation of the Province of Quebec to Acadia. What makes Quebec a “French Province”: The language, of course, but many other factors that are even more vital, such as the Quebec CIVIL CODE, the Educational system and other French cultural traditions which are stronger today than they ever were. On the other hand, the tremendous industrial development of Canada is in the hands of English-speaking companies.

MOTION PICTURES 3:30 and 8:00 p.m.

October 14

“Her People Rejoiced”

“Trouping the Colour”

November 11

“The Golden Twenties”

December 9

“Rome, the Eternal City”

“The Holy Land”

“The Littlest Angel”









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